New York Theatre Critics' Reviews 1954

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NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK POST
NEW YORK MIRROR
NEW YORK WORLD TELEGRAM & THE SUN
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK TIMES

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"Black-Eyed Susan"

DAILY NEWS

December 24, 1954

'Black-Eyed Susan,' a Farce, Wins Rather Mild Approval From Critic

By JOHN CHAPMAN

"Black-Eyed Susan," a play by A. B. Shiffrin, was presented at the Playhouse last evening. It is a farce. It also is a fiasco. Moreover, it is shoddy, sleezy, leering, vulgar, blatant, ill-mannered, coarse, witless, feckless, insulting, discouraging and unfunny.

The office dictionary defines a farce as "a light dramatic composition of satirical or humorous cast in which great latitude is allowed as to probability of happenings and naturalness of characters." Well, "Black-Eyed Susan" has great latitude, sure enough, but I don't expect it will have much longitude.

The plot concerns a fashionable neurologist who is visited by a young married woman who has chosen him to be the sire of her child, and who seduces him. The producers seduced a good actor, Vincent Price, into playing the neurologist. They also picked up some other capable players to do their hapless best—Kay Medford, an excellent brassy comedienne; Everett Sloane, Charles Boaz and, for the title role, a lissome newcomer named Dana Wynter. Gregory Ratoff directed the thing.

"BLACK-EYED SUSAN"

Comedy by A. B. Shiffrin; staged by Gregory Ratoff; scenery and costumes by William Molyneux; presented by Gordon W. Pollock in association with Everett Hart and James Goodman at the Playhouse Theatre, December 23, 1954. The cast:

Dr. Nicholas Marsh.....Vincent Price
Dr. Zelda Barry...Kay Medford
Dr. Louis Beaumont.....Everett Sloane
Susan Gillespie....Dana Wynter
Peter Gillespie....Charles Boaz

The New York Times

December 24, 1954

Theatre: Foul Ball

All Goes Well in 'Black-Eyed Susan' Until First Actor Steps on Stage

By BROOKS ATKINSON

ANYONE can see that "Black-Eyed Susan," which opened at the Playhouse Thursday evening, is a dirty show. But is it funny?

As usual, the audience laughed. After the final curtain, one elderly gentleman was heard to remark appreciatively: "Well-done show!" But in this department's opinion, A. B. Shiffrin's comedy is the lowest of the season, and that is a long way down this year. For dirt is no substitute for talent; and to judge by "Twilight Walk" and "Black-Eyed Susan," Mr. Shiffrin has no recognizable talent as a playwright.

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Let's give credit wherever it is due. For instance, to William Molyneux, the scene designer. He has designed a stunning office for a doctor—peach walls, black and gold bookshelves, modernistic divan, the whole thing most inviting. Being a radical, Mr. Molyneux has omitted fireplace and staircase. When the curtain went up, Mr. Molyneux's set got a round of applause, which is always an ominous episode in the theatre.

As soon as the actors appear and the comedy begins, "Black-Eyed Susan" starts to disintegrate. They should have played the set and omitted the comedy. For Mr. Shiffrin has a sniggering yarn to unfold about a married woman who seduces a doctor, against his will. Mr. Shiffrin has managed to relate this with a minimum of humor and a maximum of grossness. The second half of the play is not up to the standard of the first.

It would be interesting to know what actors think about when they play in comedies as distasteful as this one. Vincent Price, for example. Do you remember when he played the rapturous Prince Albert in "Victoria Regina"? What's more to the point, does he? Under Gregory Ratoff's obtuse and noisy direction, Mr. Price acts the part of the seduced doctor as if he were leading man in a school play. This is his most untalented performance since "The House of Wax," a notably squalid movie.

Or, take the case of Kay Medford. Not so long ago, she was stirring up a lot of enthusiasm around town for a versatile performance in "Lullaby." Now she plays a love-sick doctoress with no conspicuous subtlety. As the seductive married woman, Dana Wynter follows the author's instructions literally.

"Black-Eyed Susan" is likely to give indecency a bad name.

Daily Mirror

December 24, 1954

'Black-Eyed Susan' Bows At the Playhouse

By ROBERT COLEMAN

Having penned a few creditable plays and failed to hit the jackpot with them, A. B. Shiffrin tried for the sure money with a rough and rowdy sex farce called "Black-Eyed Susan." Gordon W. Pollock chaperoned it into the Playhouse Thursday evening, where, despite a solid production, it is not likely to linger long.

"BLACK-EYED SUSAN" has to do with a pretty young matron who wants to have a child. She appeals to an aging and ailing neurologist for help and gets it. When her jealous husband becomes suspicious, the philandering physician's femme associate aids him to square matters to the satisfaction of all concerned.

There are other complications in the three acts, but as far as we are concerned the foregoing is enough to give you an idea of the shenanigans on tap at the Playhouse. Shiffrin has used a burlesque slapstick in telling his fable, which is filled with double entendres and just about everything else but strip teasers. It's Minsky without music.

Producer Pollock has snared some first-rate troupers to play Shiffrin's puerile prank. There is Vincent Price, for instance, giving all he's got on behalf of the gallivanting Galen. And it's much too good for him, if you ask us. Kay Medford, one of our more ingratiating comediennes, is excellent as usual as the modern-day Doctor Walker. All distaff medicos should be so attractive.

EVERETT SLOANE is interesting as an eccentric heart specialist who, like his neurological colleague, is addicted to gaudy vests and shirts. They are enough to scare any patient into remaining one. Dana Wynter, as pretty as a pin-up girl, is a sultry seductress, and Charles Boaz is properly dull as her husband who, however, is smart enough to figure out some answers for himself.

Gregory Ratoff has staged the fumbling frolic at a fast pace. He doesn't give you time to realize how feeble some of its jests really are. For, as Miss Medford said to Price at one point during the proceedings: You spend half your time thinking up corny jokes and the rest of it laughing at them.

Well, by now you may have gotten the notion that "Black-Eyed Susan" will most certainly not go on our list of the best plays of the year. But, in all fairness to Pollock, Shiffrin, Price, Medford et al, we must report that a majority of the first-nighters laughed uproariously and bestowed robust applause on the new arrival.

IF IT LACKS genuine cleverness and good taste, it does have vitality. There are times when it creates the illusion of almost being good, but not good, clean fun. If nostalgia impels you to search for burlycue, "Black-Eyed Susan" may be your dish of tea. But it's not ours, even with such a honey in it as Kay Medford.

NEW YORK Herald Tribune
December 24, 1954

THEATER

'Black-Eyed Susan'

By WALTER F. KERR

Sex Again

JUST once during the new farce at the Playhouse does director Gregory Ratoff set his two principal characters to talking at the same time, making it absolutely impossible to tell what either of them is saying. I don't know about Mr. Ratoff. Here he has found the perfect way to play all of "Black-Eyed Susan," and he lets it slip away from him.

• • •

A. B. Shiffrin is the author of the town's latest attempt to revive sex as a sport and he is certainly a quick one with a no-entendre. At one point in the evening's gamy desperations he manages to make the phrase "status quo" sound wistfully indecent—not funny, just indecent. At others he constructs elaborate plant-lines on the order of "Do you really want me to press for an alliance?" so that he can have a little pop-eyed fun with the word "press" a moment later.

Sometimes he puts his mind to it and comes up with a corking subtlety. There is, for instance, a sequence in which a married woman comes to Doctor Vincent Price to announce that he has fathered her child. Mr. Price does a front take—so that we shall know something fine is coming—and murmurs:

"I guess this is what is known as a pregnant pause."

• • •

Well, it rollicks along like that all evening. First Mr. Price is being rude to his patients: "Your spinal column is upside down, which is why you're getting all your messages at the wrong end." Then he is scurrying around his professional couch with this married woman in hot pursuit (she wants a baby, and her husband can't give her one).

Mr. Price scurries as though he'd been in training, under Edward Everett Horton perhaps, for months and months. The methods of the farceur are elaborately anatomized: no clutch, crouch, spin, gasp stagger, shudder or reel is neglected. The actor clasps his hands to his breast and cries "Me?" in alarmed falsetto; he leans backward at an implausible angle, one shoulder raised, to shield himself from his amorous Susan; his head droops and his knees sag until he is turned into a living question-mark; he slaps his face, shivers when his ear is tickled, dances stiff-legged, and collapses —successively—on sofa, stairway, and coffee-table. The technical detail is staggering.

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Kay Medford, as a medical colleague who yearns for him, plays it a bit more coolly. The author has a fondness for rhyming and non-rhyming alliterations—"virility has nothing to do with sterility," "let's capture a little rapture," "her troubles are mental and dental"—and Miss Medford has rather more than her share of these jewels to pass on to posterity. She is able to make some of them sound quite tolerable, mostly by snarling them in a tobogganing voice that anticipates, and thereby takes the edge off, your own despair. Miss Medford has a rueful lower lip, disillusioned eyes, and—for the occasion—a pair of flat feet: all these things help. You feel that everything is against Miss Medford—plotwise and otherwise—and you love her for her unquenchable spirit.

• • •

Elsewhere in the company you will come across an eyeful of an ingenue named Dana Wynter, belligerently backing the good doctor into more corners than you knew were in the set and, to show that she is of French descent, pronouncing 'illustrated' as 'illyustrated.' Everett Sloane is brick and unbelievably bracing as still another neurosurgeon, and Charles Boaz is upstanding as a betrayed husband with a gun in his pocket. The office background, designed by William Molyneux, runs to cheerful pastels and the cacti and candelabra of modern medical living; it is considerably more attractive than the arch and labored lusts that take fire in it. Why has sex become such hard work?

At the end of one scene Mr. Price, finally surrendering to the lass who is pawing him, announces "Susan, I have a line here but I'm not allowed to say it, even in New York." Well, Susan, I have a thought here, but I'm not allowed to say it, even in the Herald Tribune.

Journal-American
December 24, 1954

A New High In Low Taste

Bundle of Soiled Linen Called Tour de Force of Miscasting

By JOHN McCLAIN

A NEW HIGH in low taste was achieved last night at the Playhouse Theatre with the premiere of "Black-Eyed Susan," starring Vincent Price. This consignment of soiled linen, bundled together with some torn pages from Miller's Joke Book, provided a tour de force of miscasting.

Mr. Price is an estimable actor, as his long and lustrous record attests, but in this instance somebody has thrown him a third strike, low and outside, and it is a painful experience to see him take such an hysterical cut at it—only to wind up breathless on his back. Somewhat the same can be said of Kay Medford, likewise gifted and incapable of being unfunny for long, but she must cringe at the prospect of playing some of the scenes required of her.

For it is utterly absurd to have cast Mr. Price in the role of a glib and raffish neurologist, with a fixation for nineteen-year-old girls, and Miss Medford as his graduate-physician assistant. It might have made more sense had the roles been reversed.

There is also the matter of the story itself. Right away we are told that Mr. Price himself a doctor, is doomed to death by an undefined disease which we all know will be cured long before the final curtain. In his own office is Miss Medford yearning for love. But it's got to take something over two hours to get them together or you haven't got a show. So, unhappily, it does.

And Surprise!

A new character is introduced—an exceedingly attractive young woman who has worshipped him from afar and wants him to be the father of the child her husband is unable to provide. You see the limitless possibilities? Miss Medford watching all this, the young lady flinging herself at him, the denouemont with the injured husband, and the final moment (surprise!) in which he realizes that the grass is greener in his own back yard.

Even this plot might be acceptable if it were not burdened with a great many poor jokes and embarrassing cliches. For example, I find it almost impossible to sit through another scene in which somebody who scarcely drinks suddenly gets loaded and, with this newfound courage, forces the hero or heroine into the only situation that will resolve the plot.

It is impossible to believe that either Mr. Price or Miss Medford are very happy with what they're doing.

As for the others it must be noted that Everett Sloane comes closest to bringing some sanity to the proceedings; that Dana Wynter, a newcomer, is ravishly attractive as the girl, and that Charles Boag makes a manful struggle with the role of the bewildered husband.

Maybe I don't get around, but I have never, frankly, seen a doctor's officer approximating the one devised by William Molyneux for this charade: deep couches and a bar and bottles within easy reach. My doctor and I have to walk 'way around the corner.

"Black-Eyed Susan" is certainly not for the kids—or the adults, either.

New York World-Telegram and The Sun

December 24, 1954

'Black-Eyed Susan' Opens at Playhouse

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

"Black-Eyed Susan" is an offensive little effort to be raw about marriage, parenthood, and sex in general.

This exhibition at the Playhouse could make all the Puritanical hypocrisy of the Victorian Age seem welcome back. Fortunately it is so tasteless, inept and humorless, that it is not likely to infect many people with such reactionary pipe dreams.

The clinical caprice concerns a doctor who has not long to live. His younger partner is a female medico who yearns for him, but habitually accepts her chaste state as permanent.

Not so, the patient whose nickname gives the play its title. She has a husband who provides her with no heirs. So she picks the doctor as replacement, allowing for his quick departure from this life to prevent complications.

Doctor is Cured.

Inevitably the first doctor is cured, and the lady doctor gets him. What becomes of the patient, her husband and child could hardly matter less.

There is nothing "Black-Eyed Susan" will not try for a laugh. If it were less dreary, it would be consistently embarrassing.

It substitutes abusiveness for wit, and juvenile innuendo for daring. Its most high-grade repartee is "I'll go home when I'm good and ready," to which the reply is "You'll never be good, and I'll never be ready."

The Actors Laugh.

The actors laugh so often, the audience does not have to help, even for the sake of good manners. The acting is ordinary.

Vincent Price as the doctor contents himself with mugging, and a general comportment that reminds you of Noel Coward limbering up for "tennis anyone." Kay Medford makes noises like a raven, and Everett Sloane tries to spice his lines with a French accent.

As the young married couple, Dana Wynter is very pretty and Charles Boaz is big and earnest.

"Black-Eyed Susan" is a show to make the public wonder what became of the nice clean days of burlesque at its worst.

New York Post

December 24, 1954

By Richard Watts Jr.

The Stage Has a Yuletide Mishap

Sidney Kingsley, it is said, was anxious to get his "Lunatics and Lovers" into town before "Black-Eyed Susan" arrived, because both were sex farces, and he was fearful lest the rival work take the edge off his own comic efforts in that direction. He needn't have worried. Indeed, it only goes to show how mistaken even the smartest theatrical men can be. If "Lunatics and Lovers" had reached here, let us say, a night or two after the coming of "Black-Eyed Susan," I suspect it would have received unanimous critical raves out of sheer contrast.

For, with or without contrast, A. B. Shiffrin's "Black-Eyed Susan," which was presented at the Playhouse last evening, is an excessively dull, tedious and monotonous striving after hilarity that represents the stage at one of its lowest ebbs. Indeed, it is so generally wearisome, despite the comedy talents of Kay Medford and the prettiness of a young English actress named Dana Wynter, that it does more than make the theater seem devoted to curing insomnia. It might bring the entire institution of sex into question.

In an effort to bring a little Christmas friendliness into the sullen business of reviewing, I'll admit there is one vague possibility that Mr. Shiffrin's comedy might cause you casual amusement. If the sight of Vincent Price defending his virtue for an act and a half, and then preening himself for the rest of the evening over providing a son for a wife whose husband has failed her, strikes you as excruciatingly comic, conceivably "Black-Eyed Susan" is what you're waiting for. Even then, though, I doubt it.

If you are of the morbid type that demands more details, it may interest you to learn that Mr. Price appears as a doctor, who is told he has only a year to live. If anyone rises to suggest that this doesn't seem the most promising of comic premises, I can only tell him he is right. Anyway, Miss Medford is the efficient assistant, who loves Mr. Price but isn't loved in return. It is supposed to upset her quite a lot. At approximately this point, the wife, who can't have a baby by her husband, arrives with the idea of getting assistance.

Do you want to know why the play is called "Black-Eyed Susan"? Well, the young wife who is insistent on having Mr. Price as the father of her child is named Susan, and she has black eyes. There are two other characters in the proceedings. One is the doctor who tells his colleague he has so short a time to live, but changes his mind. He speaks with a French accent. Then there is Susan's husband, who has a couple of scenes. It is all very dreary.

None of this, by the way, destroys the fact that Miss Medford is an admirable actress with charm and a fine comic sense, and that Miss Wynter is a very beautiful girl, who probably can act. Mr. Price is commendably industrious as a farceur, while Everett Sloane, the doctor with the French accent, and Charles Boaz, the husband, do everything possible. I'll be gloomy if Variety marks me as indecisive about "Black-Eyed Susan." Happy Christmas, Mr. Shiffrin and all.

"What Every Woman Knows"

The New York Times

December 23, 1954

Theatre: Hayes and Barrie

'What Every Woman Knows' Is Revived

By BROOKS ATKINSON

WHETHER it is Helen Hayes serving James M. Barrie or the other way round, is an unsolvable problem. She and "What Every Woman Knows" are perfectly matched. As put on at the City Center Wednesday evening, the sentimental play she has acted several times before is still ideally suited to her modesty and gleaming style of comedy.

On the whole this is a very good production. Kent Smith gives an excellent performance as John Shand, the humorless, overbearing Scotsman, who does not know when he is well off. As Lady Sybil, the condescending coquette, Betsy von Furstenberg gives a light, disingenuous performance that is much to the point.

If it is a pleasure to see Mr. Smith again after a year's absence, it is fine to have Viola Roache on stage again. She plays the worldly Comtesse de la Brière with a humorous wisdom and silken grace that bring that observant role alive. There's plenty of good acting in the other parts, too—John Cromwell as an elegant English statesman; Philip Bourneuf as a pawky brother to Maggie, vigorously defined by an able stage craftsman; William Lanteau and Farrell Pelly as the other two brothers.

For the City Center has begun its current theatrical season with a thoroughly professional production under the alert direction of John Stix. In some respects it is almost too good. For Miss Hayes and her director know the script intimately. They make every point precisely. They fill in all the corners with a significant bustle of cheerful detail, making sure that every cue is picked up in just the right rhythm, and every line of dialogue underscored with just the proper humorous intonation.

Since the City Center is not always able to raise its first curtain on a neatly outlined production, this is a fault on the right side. And it assures the audience in the remote areas of the auditorium of knowing what it is seeing.

Why quibble? For "What Every Woman Knows" is a delightful sample of Barrie. The story of the drudge who makes a dull husband look brilliant is told lucidly, and the jokes about the Scots and the English have a sly undercurrent of innocent malice that is always amusing. Apart from being an intellectual leprechaun, Barrie was an expert craftsman. He knew how to make a comedy fit the stage.

•

Miss Hayes is another one of the players who have been absent from our stage too long for the well-being of the nation. Maggie Wylie is one of her most enchanting parts. Short and quick-witted against the tall and obtuse John Shand of Mr. Smith, Miss Hayes has a disarming appearance in their scenes together. She runs through Barrie's sequence of crises with sunny good humor, and her sentiment is never cloying or mawkish.

"WHAT EVERY WOMAN KNOWS"

Play by Sir James M. Barrie; staged by John Stix; production designed by John Keonig; music selected and arranged by Max Marlin; costumes by Grace Houston; presented by the New York City Center Theatre Company (Jean Dalrymple, director) at the City Center, December 22, 1954. The cast:

James Wylie...William Lanteau
Alick Wylie.....Farrell Pelly
David Wylie.....Philip Bourneuf
Maggie Wylie.....Helen Hayes
John Shand.....Kent Smith
Comtesse de la Brière:.....
Viola Roache
Lady Sybil Tenterden.....
Betsy von Furstenberg
Feikie.....Sid Cassel
Maid.....Virginia Low
Mr. Venables....John Cromwell
Manservant.....George Cathrey
Bagpiper.....James Roche

Maggie is her property by virtue of the skill with which she explores all the cunning and good-will of a droll, idealized character. Thanks to her and to Barrie, the City Center has begun its new theatre season auspiciously.

New York Post

December 23, 1954

By Richard Watts Jr.

Helen Hayes and Woman's Wisdom

One of Helen Hayes' favorite roles is Maggie Wylie in Barrie's "What Every Woman Knows," and she plays it with such slyness, humor and relish that her evident pleasure is inescapably communicated to an audience. At the City Center last night, where the perennial comedy was being revived by a generally excellent company, she was every bit as glowing and skillful as she always is, and, as Miss Hayes is not only a brilliant actress but a great American institution, even rebels against the author's notorious whimsy, were filled with disarmed admiration.

Whatever you may think of "What Every Woman Knows," there is no denying that it is one of the most influential of comedies. Its thesis that, when you find a successful man, you can be sure a wise little wife is responsible for his eminence may or may not be sound, but I suspect it has inspired more modern plays than any other comedy written in this century. There is hardly a season in which a play or two about the feminine power behind the masculine throne doesn't appear, and I suppose we might as well see the original as watch a substitute.

Personal Touch

If you will forgive a highly personal interpolation, I, as a bachelor, find this viewpoint decidedly cheering. When I see any of my friends and colleagues rising beyond me in distinction, I can bolster my ego by agreeing with Barrie that their wives are responsible, while priding myself that my own little triumphs are strictly self-managed. It also provides me with a comfortable excuse to cover my occasional failures. It might seem, then, that "What Every Woman Knows" was a comedy to be admired chiefly by wives and bachelors and suspected by husbands.

Nevertheless, despite all the cheer it should bestow on me, I must confess that I'm getting just a little tired of the play. It starts with an excellent act, in which John Shand, the humorless and ambitious young politician, is trapped into matrimony by the brothers of the unloved Maggie, but, later on, its sentimental enthusiasm for the wise wife tends to grow excessive, and the fatuousness of the husband becomes a trifle trying. Barrie couldn't help gushing, and I don't find his quaintness as disarming as it used to seem.

Ruthless Maggie

What I admire chiefly about Miss Hayes' performance is that she is never completely taken in by Maggie. She obviously admires the all-knowing little lady and appreciates her wisdom, but she also knows that, under her air of meekness and humility, there is the spirit of a ruthless and conniving female monster, who is going to have her way at any cost and will stop at nothing to get it. The pleasant result of this realistic understanding is that she takes most of the curse of saccharinity from what might be an unbearably coy character.

Although it is Miss Hayes' play, the other portrayals are admirable. Kent Smith has just the right quality for John Shand, the hollow man. John Cromwell, an invariably delightful actor, gives distinction to the role of Shand's political backer, and Viola Roache brings humor and charm to the part of a matron who understands Maggie. Betsy von Furstenberg has the proper note of pretty fatuousness for the heroine's vanquished rival, and the brothers are well done by Philip Bourneuf, William Lanteau and Farrell Pelly. But the play is chiefly important as a Helen Hayes field day. I somehow prefer her to Barrie.

Daily Mirror

December 23, 1954

Helen Hayes Scores Again In Comedy by Barrie

By ROBERT COLEMAN

The New York City Center Theatre Company couldn't have made a happier choice than Helen Hayes in "What Every Woman Knows" to open its Winter drama season. For Miss Hayes and the Barrie comedy are as inseparable as Willie Mays and the Giants. This superior combination might well be termed a gem.

OR, IF YOU don't like that superlative, supply your own. Anyway, Miss Hayes has made the Barrie delight her own particular possession. Other actresses have essayed the role of Maggie Wylie, but have of necessity suffered by comparison with the first lady of Nyack-on-Hudson. This is a part to show off her radiant charm to admirable advantage.

It seems to us that Miss Hayes is using broader gestures as the Scottish girl, who narrowly escapes spinsterhood, in this version than in former ones. This is probably due to the fact that the City Center is a big house and subleties would be lost in it. Others in the cast bring scope to their parts, also, with felicitous results.

Kent Smith proves a welcome surprise as the dour and determined John Shand, trapped into marriage with the clever Maggie through his own ambitions. He is eminently right for the part, quite convincing and likable both as the student Shand and the mature Member of Parliament.

VIOLA ROACHE brings authority and style to the sophisticated and sympathetic Comtesse de la Briere. Betsy von Furstenberg is an eye tonic as the petulant and flirtatious Lady Sybil. John Cromwell, one of our favorite actors, is good as Mr. Venables, Shand's party leader, though he could have used another rehearsal or so to advantage.

And salutes should go to Philip Bourneuf, Farrell Pelly and William Lanteau, as Maggie's shrewd, loyal and resolute brothers.

Our hat is off to each and every member of the company, for they are working for minimum Equity salaries so that we may enjoy a season of first-rate plays at reasonable prices and so that the City Center's finances can be strengthened. And we should like to cite Jean Dalrymple for arranging the current series.

• • •

JOHN STIX has staged the comedy so that all bits of business can be seen and all lines heard throughout the large theatre. This took quite a bit of doing, for the Center's acoustics are less than perfect.

"What Every Woman Knows" has become a modern classic, because it states an obvious truth with warming humor and keen insight. That truth is: behind every successful man, there is a capable and devoted woman, adroit enough to mask her wisdom and helpfulness. As a mere male, we accept the point gracefully. But if you want to argue it further with your spouse, you're on your own.

Journal-American

December 23, 1954

A Delightful Production

Helen Hayes in Starring Role Supported by Great Cast

By JOHN McCLAIN

AT THIS POINT in the proceedings almost everybody should be familiar with Sir James M. Barrie's "What Every Woma Knows," but for the neophytes and the dedicated oldsters it must be announced that it is being given about as delightful a production at City Center as either will see in their times.

Helen Hayes, whose charm can be rediscovered every time she makes an entrance, is supported by a truly memorable cast: Kent Smith, John Cromwell, Viola Roache, Betsy von Furstenberg, Philip Bourneuf and William Lanteau.

John Koenig has run up some incredibly simple and effective sets and John Stix has maintained a light and subtle sense of direction.

When we get around to examining Sir James's sturdy vehicle once again we are of course beset with another problem. As you doubtless recall, the point seems to be that strong males are mere foils in the hands of artful women.

Guided Career

Kent Smith, a robust, aspiring politician, requires something over eight years of self-delusion to discover, just before the final curtain, that it has been the little woman (Helen Hayes) who has supplied the wit and know-how to bring him to his eventual success.

It was she, all along, who injected the charming phrases in his speeches and otherwise guided his mirthless career; who, in fact, with her flawless ingenuity, won him from an alliance that might have sent him down for the count.

For some strange reason all this used to intrigue me in the days before my marriage. There was the belief that once the masterful male had found his matrimonial mate all problems would be solved. The little doll never quite lets you know what's going on, but she gets the work done, and pretty soon you are president of General Motors, or something.

Last night was the first time since my own nuptials that I have seen the Barrie classic, and I thought I might turn the findings to some practical use.

I said to my wife, "You have obviously been doing most of the brain work for me since we've been married—never, of course, letting me know it—so now I'm sure you'd be delighted to go and write the review of this show. You'll find me in the bar."

She gave me an evasive answer—"no!"

Fine Performance

For which I cannot entirely endorse this play, not now. But it must be noted that Helen Hayes has never in her long and illustrious career been more compelling. I give you merely the moment when she runs to the corner and hides her head when the secret is out.

And Kent Smith, long concerned with heavier chores and TV commitments, emerges once again as a gifted and fluent farceur. The highest compliments I can pay John Cromwell and Viola Roache are that they are at their capable best; Betsy von Furstenberg, incidentally, is a vastly more finished actress than the last time out.

This is the kick-off for the City Center this season and Jean Dalrymple, the producer, has her team well down the field. Here is a wonderful opportunity to see Helen Hayes and a great cast—and the price is right.

New York World-Telegram and The Sun

December 23, 1954

Helen Hayes' Hit Is Career Triumph

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

Surely very few actresses in history have had the foolhardy courage to pick up a successful role some 30 years after they first triumphed in it, and try again. That is what Miss Helen Hayes is doing in the City Center's revival of "What Every Woman Knows".

The result is not just a success. It is a triumph, and not the triumph of an actress or even a star, but the triumph of a whole career.

One is accustomed to thinking of Barrie's great comedy as an intimate, often delicate, and very touchy little story. Miss Hayes has conceived it, or reconceived it, in terms of a stature bigger than life, which makes it the masterpiece it deserves to be.

Bold Gesture.

The star plays the comic scenes of Maggie Wylie with bold gestures. The full sweep of an arm is halted for emphasis. A hand creeps up from the back of her head and lifts her bangs in exasperation. She leans forward from the waist as if dancing a minuet.

It is all big, right on the edge of a cartoon. Yet so perfect is the stars' sense of proportion, so sure her plan, that when she wants to break your heart, she need only stand still and limit the vocal range of this gawky, determined, eagle-hearted little woman.

This is grand theater. It is like watching a charioteer who has learned to drive sixteen horses in perfect step.

Modest at First.

And anyone who thinks the Barrie play will not bear this sort of performing, has only to go watch. In the beginning, when Maggies' brothers are optioning her a husband, she is gauche and tasteless. Modesty is her one virtue.

When she has proven to John Shand that her wit accounts for at least half his political success, she has a whole new glow. From a woman in love, she has become a woman who knows she is loved. It is a long way, and it makes all the difference.

Miss Hayes had courage, but she certainly knew what she was about.

The star is aided on every side with the most professional sort of assistance. As her dour husband, Kent Smith is ideal, enormous, classically handsome and utterly humorless until the final curtain. Mr. Smith's acting seems to grow these seasons by geometric progressions.

Ample Comtesse.

Viola Roache is a beautiful, ample Comtesse, who provides the catalyst to Maggie's intrigues with joyful wit. And Betsy Von Furstenberg has a meringue-like beauty and cool humor, as Maggie's rival.

John Cromwell etches a rich comic figure in his couple of brief scenes as Venables, and Philip Bourneuf is properly assertive and stubborn as the more voluble of the Wylie boys.

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

December 23, 1954

THEATER

What Every Woman Knows'

By WALTER F. KERR

What Helen Hayes Knows

HELEN HAYES first played Maggie Wylie in "What Every Woman Knows" some twenty-seven years ago, and I suspect that her performance has improved in the meantime. The reason I suspect so is that if Miss Hayes' performance had been as magnificent then as it is now, the original production would still be running.

This bit of showmanship at City Center is something that should be required playgoing for all young actresses who hope to get on in the world. Miss Hayes is not simply reading Sir James M. Barrie's still lively lines for their full value, or offering us a kind of single-personality "interpretation" of the role. She is offering us, in a way, a summary of her career. Having played practically everything from sober melodrama to fanciful farce, she has now come to a point where "style" disappears and we get instead a distillation of all styles, blissfully unified.

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Thus in a single scene this diminutive, but transparently diabolic, actress is able to run over the whole scale—and keep it in harmony. The second act finds Maggie Wylie in possession of a very promising young husband-to-be. She has got him in a horse-trading deal, her right to him is written out in a document, and the moment has come for her to claim him. She is a canny Scotswoman, and means to let no man cheat her. But she is also in love with her hard-won prize, and would like to tear up the "document" so that he can come to her freely.

To watch Miss Hayes play the scene is to see a whole rainbow of contrary emotions flash and sputter and then run together. The actress clings to a railing as she tentatively feels her way toward freeing him; she leaps from it like an undersized lioness at the first thought that he might want his freedom. As she listens to her own tenacious insistence on the bargain, she laughs at herself; and as she slowly steels herself to the sacrifice that is surely coming, she cries. Maggie Wylie isn't revealed to us step by step; she comes all of a piece—sly, honest, tantalizing and wonderful.

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And it is City Center's further good fortune to have Kent Smith on hand to play John Shand. Shand is, of course, the impoverished scholar with a brilliant future whose future is assured by the husband-hunting Wylie brothers and whose brilliance is assured by Maggie. The role is most often played with strong intimations of the M. P.-to-come, from the outset. Mr. Smith gives it unexpected dimension by making you first believe in Shand the railway-porter, then Shand the boiler-maker, only finally Shand the lady-killing politician. There is an ingratiating obtuseness, a wholly sincere thick-headedness, in the actor's bewilderment over his lack of humor, his anxiety to discover what is "vulgar" about him, his perplexed discovery that Maggie is of some use to him. The scenes between Miss Hayes and Mr. Smith, in which every nuance is nursed to perfect completion, are unalloyed joys.

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Under John Stix' direction a half dozen other players add amiable frills to this ancient, but eminently actable, Valentine. Viola Roche needs only to roll out an emphatic "Ha, ha!" to send a wave of laughter rollicking back toward 55th St. Betsy von Furstenburg, as the idle charmer who nearly snares Maggie's single possession, is alarmingly funny as she searches her soul for an inspiring idea, or as she shatters her own nobility with an irrepressible giggle. Miss von Furstenburg is catnip in Grace Houston's costumes, too. John Cromwell has a few moments of salty refinement as a political bigwig, and Philip Bourneuf, Farrell Pelly, and William Lanteau are fine as the Wylie hearties.

John Koenig's simplified settings are serviceable, with traces of genuine invention in some plaid portals and a cream-colored cottage for the comedy's final winning moments. City Center has opened its eleventh season with more than efficiency, though. It has opened it with Helen Hayes, and what more did you want for Christmas?

DAILY NEWS

December 23, 1954

Helen Hayes Opens City Center's Play Season in a Barrie Comedy

By JOHN CHAPMAN

Helen Hayes, who is forever beloved and always gallant, opened the New York City Center Theatre Company's new season last evening by playing Maggie Wylie in James Barrie's discreet sex comedy, "What Every Woman Knows." Plays far more rugged than this one have long since been cast aside, but the Barrie work remains pertinent and is astonishingly durable.

By now it should be quaint, but it isn't—and it won't ever be quaint, I suppose, as long as the free world acknowledges the benevolent dictatorship of the female. All Barrie says, in effect, is that Mama Loves Papa but Mama Knows Best. This is a simpler and more sure-fire modern plot than the scenario of "Abie's Irish Rose," "Romeo and Juliet" or "Carmen."

Experts Help

It helps, of course, when some experts get together to act "What Every Woman Knows," and it helped last evening when a good company rallied to the support of Miss Hayes. Although Helen has been acting the wily Miss Wylie now and again for quite a number of years, she can't do the play all by herself.

At the City Center she has Kent Smith give a bad or dishonest performance, and he is about all one would ask for in the role of a husband who takes four acts to realize that he is in love with his wife because she is smarter than he is. Miss von Furstenberg plays the role of the other woman as though she might be in "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes," and I found the performance amusing. I was particularly taken with Viola Roache's skillful impersonation of the wise and helpful countess who seeks to bring peace among the sexes.

Affectionate Audience

The others in the City Center company include two gentlemen who can register on any stage, John Cromwell and Philip Bourneuf. But in essence the play belongs to Miss Hayes and she does not let it down. She is droll, she is sweet, she is pathetic, she is funny and she is determined—everything that Barrie intended his Maggie Wylie to be.

Miss Hayes couldn't do anything else, of course, because she is an Actress with a capital A. Last evening's City Center enthusiasts gave her an affectionate and appreciative welcome.

"Portrait of a Lady"

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

December 22, 1954

THEATER

'Portrait of a Lady'

By WALTER F. KERR

Americans Abroad

'PORTRAIT OF A LADY" is a small, dreary island of a show, entirely surrounded by Cathleen Nesbitt. In the William Archibald dramatization of Henry James' novel, Miss Nesbitt plays an American expatriate who has so thoroughly forgotten the land of her birth that she can only connect it, vaguely, with some one called Johnny Appleseed. She has spent years cultivating herself in the approved Italian-villa manner, she has seen and seen through everything, and she is now a figure of tart and elegant mockery.

Miss Nesbitt's happy smirk, as she munches a grape and runs a verbal stiletto through the innocents and scoundrels around her, is a joy to watch—and to share. Indeed, any time this graceful, accomplished, and penetrating actress is willing to read the whole of Mr. James' novel, single-handed, I shall be happy to attend.

* * *

She is, though, the only performer to bring any sense of wit, or of pointed social meaning, to the well intentioned venture at the ANTA Playhouse. Good actors abound: there is Halliwell Hobbes in a fragment of a part, Jan Farrand making the most of two brief scenes, Barbara O'Neil in a longish but mystifying portrait of a "chipped and cracked" adventuress who cannot bear to look at herself in a strong light. Also on stage are Douglas Watson, Robert Flemyng, Kathleen Comegys—all ready to serve.

* * *

And there is a radiant visual center to the proceedings in the person of Jennifer Jones. Miss Jones, making her debut on Broadway, moves with delicacy, smiles enchantingly, and looks like several million in Cecil Beaton's white, beige and wine-red costumes. She is, however, technically immature. The lines are filtered softly and musically through a kind of dramatic hour-glass: each bit of dialogue passes at the same rate, and with pretty much the same intonation. The emotional reactions are limited, too: there is a kind of childlike gayety, and there is a tight-lipped, drawn evasiveness—and the catalogue is complete. Though Miss Jones finds some dignity and a sudden trace of force in a troubled last-act scene, the performance as a whole is curiously light, unvaried, thin.

She is playing an orphaned American girl thrust into the unfamiliar, and exceedingly complex, life of British drawing-rooms and Continental villas. "All I want," she tells us early in the evening, "is to know more of the human heart, beyond what people tell me." In getting to know more, she finds herself married to an indolent and empty dabbler in water colors, caught in one loveless marriage and helping to prepare another, lost forever to the consumptive young cousin who might have made her happy.

* * *

It cannot be said that Mr. Archibald has helped his players much in outlining the subtleties of fashionable marriage and cultural displacement.

His heroine is heard to say that her "life has been a tangle of vague outlines that has never been corrected by a person of authority," and he may have taken the girl far too literally in fashioning his play. The outlines *are* vague: it is never clear to us what the innocent Isabel Archer is looking for in the way of experience; it is never clear why she thinks she has found it in her supercilious dilettante; it is never clear how she has come to maturity through the miseries of a misalliance. The echoes of the Henry James structure may be heard in the distance; they fail to enter, stage left or stage right, with any clarity, immediacy, or emotional vitality. The evening is, from first to last, undefined.

It does benefit—above and beyond Miss Nesbitt's contribution—from two things. William and Jean Eckart have supplied impressive brass-handled doors, handsome trellises for an Italian villa, and a general air of wistful elegance. And the ANTA Theater itself, given a dazzling new decor by its proprietors, creates an aura of great expectations—expectations that may be fulfilled as the season moves on.

"PORTRAIT OF A LADY"

Play by William Archibald, based on the Henry James novel; staged by Jose Quintero; settings and lighting by William and Jean Eckart; costumes by Cecil Beaton; presented by Lyn Austin and Thomas Noyes and The Producers Theatre at the ANTA Theatre, December 21, 1954. The cast:

Lord Warburton...Peter Pagan
Mr. Touchett...Halliwell Hobbes
Casper Goodwood..Eric Fleming
Ralph Touchett..Douglas Watson
Isabel Archer...Jennifer Jones
Mrs. Touchett..Kathleen Comegys
Henrietta Stackpole..Jan Farrand
Serena Merle...Barbara O'Neil
Gilbert Osmond..Robert Flemyng
Pansy.....Marcia Morris
Countess Gemini.....
Cathleen Nesbitt

Daily Mirror

December 22, 1954

'Portrait of a Lady' Well Framed in ANTA

By ROBERT COLEMAN

Screen star Jennifer Jones had a plush premiere in "Portrait of a Lady" at the ANTA Theatre Tuesday evening. This house, formerly the Guild, has been beautifully refurbished for the occasion. It is now one of the most modern and comfortable to be found anywhere.

* * *

MISS JONES MUST have made financial sacrifices to appear on our stage, for which we should be grateful. We can only regret that her vehicle has a limited appeal. Fashioned by William Archibald from a novel by Henry James, it is essentially a bitter play about cruel and cynical cosmopolites.

It has to do with American expatriates abroad during the late 1870s. This was a time when wealthy snobs went to Europe in search of culture, titles and happiness. Few got the latter, including James himself, who cuts his ilk to ribbons in this morbid study of misery.

"Portrait of a Lady" is concerned primarily with an American girl who has the choice of marrying an idealistic consumptive, a British lord or a brittle, frustrated sophisticate. Under the spell of Florence, she chooses the latter, a nasty fellow who thinks himself something of a genius.

SHE IS COMPLETELY disillusioned by his selfishness and venality, and realizes in the end that her affections had really belonged to her ailing cousin, who had provided her with the means to make a terrible mistake. But he had sought only to give her independence, hoping that she had it within herself to use his beneficence wisely.

Lyn Austin and Thomas Noyes, in association with the Producers Theatre, have given "Portrait of a Lady" the best of everything.

Miss Jones is gracious and graceful as the American girl who makes an unfortunate marriage. She achieves genuine emotional impact in such sequences as permit it. Robert Flemyng is excellent as the petulant dilletante who would impose his imperious will on her. Barbara O'Neil is a clever and ruthless matchmaker, while Halliwell Hobbes, Douglas Watson, Kathleen Comegys, Peter Pagan, Eric Fleming, Jan Farrand and Marcia Morris get all they can from their respective roles.

* * *

BUT IT IS Cathleen Nesbitt, a truly fine actress, who brings what spark there is to the production.

"Portrait of a Lady" has much to recommend it, but not sufficient. Archibald, who did an evocative and moodful adaptation of James' "The Turn of the Screw" some semesters ago, as "The Innocents," has now arranged a series of interesting portraits in a rather static and pallid background.

It is like seeing adoritly-etched pictures in a gallery, wondering what those who sat for them must have been, and coming away with some, but not all, of the answers. Somehow, they remain bloodless and but momentarily intriguing. Perhaps the solution to it all lies in the fact that American expatriates before the turn of the century were a dull and spurious lot, almost Chekovian in their ineffectuality.

Journal American

December 22, 1954

Effort at a Mood Lacks Excitement

By JOHN McCLAIN

"PORTRAIT OF A LADY," which opened at the refurbished ANTA Theatre last night, is a very pretty canvas.

The people in it are decorative, and they pose and posture gracefully against colorful backgrounds; there is even beauty in some of the things they say. But the picture lacks depth and excitement—it may arrest your attention, but it doesn't hold your interest for an evening.

There is a sort of languid and lustreless air to everything that goes on. Chekhovian figures stroll luxuriantly in and out of the premises, delivering several thousand carefully selected words; others sit in an assortment of poses on gardens and terraces, content to listen and remain motionless.

One waits for something to happen—perhaps an earthquake will shake them into activity—but it never comes. The speeches drone on, and the curtain finally descends.

Appears Dated

"Dated" is not my favorite word, but it is the best I can extract from Mr. Roget at the moment, and it seems to apply. The unending problems of a young lady of means in the years 1870-odd, none of which would produce more than a paragraph on the obituary page today, are hardly sufficient to capture an audience geared to the threat of total destruction. Unless, of course, they are magnificently contrived—which, unhappily, they are not.

It never appeared a matter of vast importance that Miss Jennifer Jones, the star, was captivated by a shallow and charming expatriate living in Florence. Or that she should leave him, too late, and return to her true love. There may be nothing wrong with this idea, but it was not conceived with either enough eloquence or dramatic impact to carry the load.

I have great regard for Miss Jones as a motion picture actress, and I say that without any disparagment, but I honestly think that to make "Portrait of a Lady" come to any semblance of life would require the services of a real theatre "pro" with an enormous bag of tricks and the determination to beat the audience into submission with a blunt instrument if the occasion required.

Play Lacking

The stuff isn't there in the play, and Jennifer doesn't have the stage experience, or confidence, to go beyond it.

The player coming closest to it is Cathleen Nesbitt, but she has the double advantage of being eminently experienced and having the few scoring scenes in the show.

Robert Flemyng was probably following orders and submitting to a highly-stylized school of acting, but he never seemed to deliver a speech without carefully bending one knee and flexing his other leg. Most of what he said didn't require this serious contortion.

Barbara O'Neil is a gifted actress, although I will defy her—or anybody else—to clarify thoroughly her movements and motivation in the story.

On the other hand, sincere and unqualified kudos must be handed William and Jean Eckart for their two delightful sets, and Cecil Beaton for the costumes. Jose Quintero, the director, was apparently shooting at a certain mood, but his fowling piece was loaded with listless words.

"Portrait of a Lady" is a bright and lifeless pastel.

New York Post

December 22, 1954

By Richard Watts Jr.

Attempt to Dramatize Henry James

Dramatizing Henry James is not an easy task, as William Archibald might be the first to tell you today. For Mr. Archibald, who had considerable success in making a play out of the great man's "The Turn of the Screw" a few years ago, was emboldened to try it again with "Portrait of a Lady," with results that are at best indifferent. In fact, as it was offered last night at the refurbished ANTA Theater, I'm afraid the drama was pretty much of a handsome, dignified and elaborate bore, save for the moments when Cathleen Nesbitt was on the stage.

Whenever Miss Nesbitt, playing the poisonously sardonic sister of a decadent American expatriate in Florence, appeared, the play suddenly came to unexpected, though brief, life. In part, this was perhaps due to the fact that her subsidiary role contained the only wit in an otherwise bald and pedestrian narrative. The circumstance that the beldame she was portraying spent most of her time sneering at the dull people surrounding her also no doubt had something to do with her success. Chiefly, though, it was because Miss Nesbitt is such a good actress.

This reviewer is unfortunately among the illiterates who have never read "Portrait of a Lady," but I believe Jamesian authorities look upon it as not only one of the finest and subtlest of his works but one of the great novels in the English language. To one coming upon it for the first time in the theater, it seems clear that it possesses thoughtful and fairly intangible qualities of observation of character, manners, morals and social contrast that make tremendous demands on one daring enough to try bringing it to the stage.

All that Mr. Archibald appears to have been able to do was to provide a flat and literal outline of the book's physical events, which must have been its least interesting feature. Although his "Portrait of a Lady" is not a very eventful drama and seems to be taking its time, he has to rush on his people and make them characterize themselves at once as noble, pathetic, decadent, bored, outspoken or meddling. In the first act, at least, my impression was that the predominate trait of most of them was impoliteness. None of them emerged as exactly subtle.

The lady of the title, it may be time to say, is a forthright and independent American girl of the 1870s, who hopes to find culture and sophistication in Europe. After rejecting as suitors a bored English lord and an arrogant American, she goes to Florence, where she marries a selfish and penniless American expatriate, who is palmed off on her by the disagreeable fellow's mistress. She rescues his unhappy daughter from a loveless marriage and leaves him when his sister exposes to her his true character. It is all pretty placid dramatically.

To the evening's credit is a fine physical production, with handsome sets by the Eckarts and beautiful period costumes by Cecil Beaton. The title role is enacted by the cinema's Jennifer Jones, who looks beautiful, plays her simpler scenes charmingly and finds the more emotional moments rather beyond her. Several excellent actors, including Robert Flemyng as the expatriate, are to a large extent wasted, but I thought Barbara O'Neil as the mistress, Halliwell Hobbes as a dying American exile and, in particular, Marcia Morris as the innocent daughter caught the proper spirit. But even Miss Nesbitt can't rescue "Portrait of a Lady."

DAILY NEWS

December 22, 1954

New ANTA Playhouse Is a Beauty, But 'Portrait of a Lady' Is a Bore

By JOHN CHAPMAN

The old Guild Theatre on W. 52d St., whose original architecture I can only describe as Early Alice Foote Macdougall, has became the classiest playhouse in town. Now called the ANTA Theatre, it has been completely rebuilt by Robert W. Dowling and the City Investing Company into a place of simple beauty. It is spacious, cheerful and quietly elegant; its sight lines from the front row to the back and from side to side are admirable, and so are its acoustics, which I also checked from front to back last evening.

Unhappily, while I was checking the acoustics, I listened to a play—"Portrait of a Lady," adapted by William Archibald from a Henry James novel. Archibald had great success when he made another James novel into the odd and suspenseful "The Innocents," but all he has managed this time is a talky and steadily unexciting stage version of a creaky piece of Victorian inaction whose modern value strikes me as negligible.

Stilted Production.

In "Portrait of a Lady," which concerns itself with expatriate Americans who lead hoity-toity lives in Britain and Italy, nobody commits a grammatical error, much less a faux-pas. A character is really pouring out his anguished heart when he inquires, politely, "Have you no feelings for me?" One of the characters, who has exhausted his strength and become fatally tubercular by growing a beard, says he has read all the old books and they do not interest him because "the language is dead."

Well, the language of the play is dead, too, and Jose Quintero's stately direction fails to whip much life into the actors as they pause and pose. Once in a while Jennifer Jones, a beautiful young woman with a lovely voice, does manage to bring some heartbeats into the role of an independent American girl who falls victim of her own strength of character and makes a loveless marriage. As her husband, Robert Flemyng is incisive and has a clear grasp of his cold-blooded and nasty role. He is a Victorian Mr. Manningham.

Handsome Setting

But the other actors, including Peter Pagan, Halliwell Hobbes, Douglas Watson, Jan Farrand and Barbara O'Neil, seem rather at a loss, having little to do but look picturesque and speak when spoken to. Even Cathleen Nesbitt, whom I usually admire, disappoints me in her rather desperate overplaying of a sophisticate.

The production of "Portrait of a Lady" is as handsome an example of the Victorian period as the ANTA Playhouse is of our own severely classic Federal period. The two sets by William and Jean Eckart, of a fine English house and garden and a Florentine villa, are beautiful examples of scenic design and lighting. The costumes, by Cecil Beaton, also are works of art. It's a pity that Beaton wasn't the editor of Godey's Lady's Book.

Only one architectural detail of this fine new ANTA Theatre remains as a drawback. One walks upstairs from the big lobby (whose box office, way in back, is not the traditional cage but a broad and well-manned counter) to get to the orchestra floor. Walking up is easy, but last evening walking down was impossible. It may be that ANTA, in order to hasten progress to the lobby for intermission smokers, should station ushers at intervals on the stairs and give the girls high-voltage electric wands such as they have in beef-packing houses.